

1968 Mustang California Special

The 1960's were a time in history where automotive companies used every means conceivable to increase vehicle sales and exposure. Arguably, Ford was perhaps the best at bringing specialty cars to market. A perfect example was the partnership with people like Carroll Shelby. The other was to continuing developing unique for a specific market. In 1968, Ford decided to produce a limited edition Mustang specifically built for the California market. Hence, the California Special or CT/CS was born.

This wasn't the first time Ford toyed with the idea of a regional car. The California Special had its roots from the very low production High Country Special (HCS), produced in 1966. Developed especially for the Denver area dealers, just 333 High Country Special's were sold. Unlike the California Special, the only unique feature of the High Country Special was the exterior color and an identifying badge on each fender.

Lee Gray, Ford's southern California district sales manager, wanted something special and convinced Lee Iacocca to produce a car just for the California market. Lee agreed and Shelby Automotive was tapped to develop the California Special. While the letters GT were on the side stripes of all GT/CS vehicles, the car was not necessarily a GT unless the GT package was ordered along with ordering a California Special. All California Specials would be available as a coupe only and all cars would be built at Ford's San Jose, California assembly plant. In early February 1968, several prototypes were shown to California dealers and orders were taken. Production began on February 17th, 1968. All colors and options of a regular Mustang were available on the California Special.

Unlike the 1966 High Country Special, the California Special would not be mistaken for a typical Mustang. Up front, special fog lamps sat within a blacked out grille opening. All California Specials used the deluxe hood with integrated turn signal lamps and special hood locks. From the side, a quarter panel side scoop added a muscular look with a side stripe including a GT/CS logo exiting the scoop. Finishing off the side was a *California Special* emblem located at the rear portion of the quarter panel. The rear end was perhaps the most aggressive showing the Shelby influence using the same 1965 T-Bird taillights, quarter panel extensions and built in deck lid spoiler used on Shelby vehicles. All GT/CS cars were given a GT styled pop-off style gas cap but with a pony emblem replacing the GT emblem. If a GT CT/CS was ordered, the same pony emblem was used.

Engine options ranged from a low performance six-cylinder to the stump pulling 428 cubic-inch V8 Cobra Jet engine. Customers could order a three-speed manual, four-speed manual or three-speed automatic transmission. As with all standard Mustangs, typical options including air conditioning, power steering, power brakes and a host of other comfort features made their way onto the California Special order sheet.

To keep other regional managers happy as well as increase sales and visibility, a modified version of the California Special was produced for the Colorado area. Production began in June 1968. The High Country Special was very close cousin to the GT/CS. In fact it was identical with the exception of a special emblem in place of the GT/CS lettering and the removal of the quarter panel emblems. The High Country Special is today a very rare commodity with only 251 produced.

By the end of the model year, Ford sold 4118 California Specials. Today, it is a highly sought after collector car and much recognized for its uniqueness. The CT/CS serves as an illustration of a time when car guys ran auto companies and imagination was limitless.